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ABSTRACT

The paper points out that while literature is primarily for enjoyment, this does not exclude concomitant learning of information, attitudes, and appreciations. It indicates that many children's books that are well-written contain an underlying ethic or moral or leave the reader with a feeling of awe and wonder at the natural and created phenomena being considered. The paper then briefly describes more than 40 books and poems for children that help the reader understand problems of life through historical novels; biographies; books of natural history, conservation, and physical science; science fiction; books of fantasy; and poetry. (TJ)

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BUILDING WITH BOOKS

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Literature is primarily for enjoyment, but this does not exclude concomitant learnings of information, attitudes, and appreciations. Books for children that can be called "literature" are written in vivid, picturesque language, present intriguing, suspenseful plots and real-live, creditable characters, and contain an underlying ethic or moral that provides a completely satisfying ending. Books of information can also be labeled "literature", I maintain, when they have a clear and tidy organization, lucid explanations, and are couched in language that not only describes precisely and accurately but also leaves the reader with a feeling of awe and wonder at the natural and man-made phenomena being considered.

Throughout recorded time, books have bridged the centuries and kept alive the history, culture, and traditions of bygone years. In his discussion of Western civilization, Lord Clark of Saltwood emphasizes that all great civilizations began with success in war. Charlemagne was the first great leader to emerge since the fall of the Roman empire, and with the help of an outstanding teacher and librarian, Alcuin of York, he collected books and had them copied, thus preserving Classical Culture for all time. Though Charlemagne created an empire and amassed great treasures, Kenneth Clark points out that:

> ...In the end it was the books that mattered--not only the texts but the illustrations and the bindings. In both of these there was a long tradition of skill, and the works of art produced under the influence of Charlemagne's revival are masterpieces. There have never been more splendid books than those illuminated for the court library, and sent as presents all over Western Europe...own Day these books were so precious that the practise arose of giving them the richest and most elaborate bindings conceivable. Usually they took the form of an ivory plaque surrounded by beaten gold and gems. A few of

> them are still in this form, but even when the gold and jewels have been stolen, the ivory plaques survive; and these small pieces of sculpture are in some ways our best indication of the intellectual life of Europe for almost two hundred years. (Clark, 1969)

Today, too, books bridge gaps between time and space and people. Books for children are no exception. They connect the reader to his world and show how Man has adapted, improved, and is conserving his environment; books reveal a reader to himself and help him understand others who are meeting and coping with similar problems of living.

In relation to his world--Through the ages, Man has adapted to his environment in order to survive. Historical records reveal his ingenuity, preseverence, and skill in putting to use the materials that surround him.

Mollie Hunter started with the fact of a series of more than 500 towers, known to archaeologists as "brochs," that dot the seacoast of her native Scotland. Since they were all built within a relatively short period of time and all on the same unique plan, she concluded they were designed by the same person. She then wove a powerful story around the architect, telling how it might have happened. The result is The Stronghold, describing a successful defense against invading Roman armies.

David Macaulay, who studied architecture at the Rhode Island School of Design, describes construction methods used in different periods of time and complements the text with fine, precise drawings. His City shows and tells how Romans planned and built a city of predetermined size, including houses and shops, public squares and temples, streets and sidewalks, sewer systems, roads and bridges, as well as public baths and entertainment centers. His Cathedral follows the nearly 90-year building of an imaginary Gothic cathedral of the 13th century, and his more recent Pyramid and Under-

ground follow suit. The reader learns to appreciate the skill and artistry of these early builders who used materials at hand and tools that were available or could be made.

It is through historical fiction and biography that readers gain an idea of what every-day life was like in other times, for such accounts add specifics to the generalizations that are, of necessity, expressed in text-books.

In a pattern reminiscent of The Canterbury Tales, Elaine Konigsburg presents a unique biography of Eleanor of Aquitaine in A Proud Taste for Scarlet and Miniver. Eleanor is in Heaven, waiting for her husband, Henry II of England, to come "Up." In the interim, she and her friends pass the time by telling of their experiences on Earth, and thus the biography emerges. Eventually King Henry makes it, but a bit late, in the company of Abraham Lincoln and Winston Churchill!

In William Bradford of Plymouth Colony, documents, maps, engravings, and other accurate records of the development of the Colony enhance both the interest and authenticity of this short biography. In addition, readers gain information about the methods of historical research as they view the first-hand accounts on which the book is based.

Books by Edwin Tunis, like those of David Macaulay, contain detailed text and fine, line drawings that expand and elucidate. His social history books, including Colonial Living, Colonial Craftsmen, Shaw's Fortune, and Frontier Living, present homey details of the every-day life of early Americans. This sample from Frontier Living will illustrate:

> Colonel Charles Goodnight invented the chuck wagon in Texas. Like most great inventions it was simple. Into the back of an ordinary wagon body, the colonel built a tall box with a drop door which he provided

> with two hinged legs to make it a worktable when it was lowered. This traveling pantry had on its shelves, flour, corn meal, brown sugar, coffee in the bean, bacon, lard, salt fatback, and a firkin of sourdough for raising biscuits. The coffeepot stood in the cooking fire embers twenty-four hours a day. In the body of the wagon along with the branding irons and the bedrolls and war bags of the outfit, the cook stowed his pothooks, skillet, stew-pot, Dutch oven (bake kettle, just like the one in the log cabin), and the tin cups and plates and iron knives, forks, and spoons his customers used. Water rode in a cask on the side of the wagon. The cook collected fuel wherever he could find any, in a cowhide slung under the vehicle and known as the possum belly. The cook was usually elderly; to the hands he was "coosie," "old woman," "pot wrangler," "gut robber," or any of a dozen other unflattering names; but he was a respected autocrat and father confessor to the outfit. (Tunis, 1961; 152)

Enough detail is given that a reader could almost make his own drawing of a chuck wagon.

Two stories relating to World War II, now past history to current elementary school children (and to some of their teachers, too), describe what happened to English children who stayed in London and to those who were evacuated. Fireweed tells how teenagers Julie and Bill join forces and live (completely above board) in the bombed-out basement of a house. The ever-present danger of the blitz, the difficulty of securing food, and the separation from family and friends is realistically and somewhat grimly portrayed.

In All the Children Were Sent Away, the author Sheila Garrigue draws on her own experiences as an evacuee and tells how eight-year-old Sara travels to Canada in the company of starchy Lady Drume, making friends with Cockney children on shipboard, surviving a torpedo attack, and finally traveling across Canada to her Aunt Jean in Vancouver, only to come down with the measles! Sara was 13 before she saw England again, and when she did arrive she went right by a graying coupie without recognizing them as

her parents.

Books like these can make the past live as no textbook can. The vicarious experiences they provide help today's readers understand better the difficulties faced by children and adults of previous generations and recognize their courage and faith in meeting obstacles.

Books also record how Man has extended the boundaries of his knowledge and reached beyond, both on the earth and in outer space. Biographies attest to ways people have achieved greatness--biographies of explorers like Giovanni da Verrazano, Captain Cook, Fritjof Nansen, Admiral Byrd, and Sir Edmund Hillary; of scientists like Gallileo, Pasteur, Madame Curie, George Washington Carver, and Enrico Fermi; of artists like John James Audubon, Thomas Hart Benton, Jenny Lind, and Maria Tallchief; and of pioneers like Johnny Appleseed, Florence Nightingale, Elizabeth Blackwell, Helen Keller, Martin Luther King, and Margaret Mead. Biographies of these leaders can be found among books for the young, and they tell a personal kind of history through their lives.

Still other books introduce readers to the natural world and help them develop an appreciation for the wonderful ways plants and animals survive. Notable among these is Anne Terry White's adaptation of Rachel Carson's The Sea Around Us. It is faithful to the original, and, along with information about life at different levels beneath the surface, creates a wonder and appreciation of the way living creatures have adjusted to their underwater environment. One excerpt will illustrate:

> Immense pressure, then, is one of the ruling conditions in the deep sea. Darkness is another.
>
> For one thing, it has affected their color. In a curious way, the colors of marine animals tend to be

> related to the zone in which they live. Fishes of the surface waters, like mackerel and herring, often are blue or green. So are the floats of the swimming snails. Lower down--below the diatom meadows and the drifting sargassum weed--where the water becomes ever more deeply and brilliantly blue, many creatures are crystal clear. Their glassy, ghostly forms blend with their surroundings and make it easier for them to escape the ever-present, ever-hungry enemy. (Carson, 1958: 43)

And at other depths, other adaptations have been made.

Hal Borland's This World of Wonder organizes topics by months of the year and treats such diverse subjects as the migration of birds, the Ice Age, and shooting stars in a way that fascinates the reader and gives him scientific explanations as well.

Books by Herbert Zim, Robert McClung, Dorothy Shuttlesworth, Millicent Selsam, and Lilo Hass, the latter two often illustrated with excellent, close-up photographs, also depict animals as they struggle for survival among their enemies and maintain the balance in nature.

The physical world is explained in easy books by Franklyn Branley, and the 1976 Children's Catalog lists 30 of them currently in print. Many of his books contain just a few concepts, each illustrated with drawings and diagrams by different artists. A Book of Satellites for You, illustrated by Leonard Kessler, describes the first four man-made satellites to be launched: Sputniks I and II, Explorer I, and Vanguard I. The kind of information each can transmit to earth is told, and briefly mentioned are other satellites -- Ranger, Surveyor, and the Mariners, and the capsules for people -- Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo. Branley's recent books include The Sun: Our Nearest Star, Gravity is a Mystery, and Solar Energy.

Other aspects of the physical sciences are discussed in books by Jeanne Bendick, such as her Television Works Like This (written with her husband Robert) and Solids, Liquids, and Gases, which asks the reader to

look around him for evidence. Herbert and Nina Schneider, Isaac Asimov, Margaret O. Hyde, and Delia Goetz are others who write about the physical world.

In 1958, Dorothy Childs Hogner write a book entitled Conservation in America, but the concepts are as pertinent today as they were then. Among contemporary authors who incorporate conservation in their books on wildlife are Berniece Freschet in Turtle Pond, which emphasizes animal survival; Nina Leen in And Then There Were None, which points out threatened species; and Walt Morey in Operation Blue Bear: A True Story, which describes the efforts of a group to rescue this bear from extinction.

Still other books about conservation relate to air and water pollution, over-population and food shortages, garbage and waste disposal and give suggestions for people to follow before it is too late.

Thus books of fact -- historical, biographical, and scientific -- provide readers with a realistic view of their world in the past and in the present. Those cited have been chosen more or less by whim, for the number from which to choose is quite overwhelming.

Imaginative books, primarily science fiction, present the world of the future, though at present there seems to be a lull in this area; perhaps reality has caught up too soon with fantasy.

However, John Christopher's trilogy, including The White Mountains, The City of Gold and Lead, and The Pool of Fire, provides a vivid, though chilling, account of a world ruled by Tripods, with men at their mercy. Tripods are three-legged, robot-type machines, shaped like beehives with tentacles that can reach out and grasp. The scene is laid in the 21st century, and the struggles of Will and his friends to save civilization and some semblance of democracy make a gripping series.

Robert Heinlein's 1951 book, Farmer in the Sky, deals with emigration from Earth because of overpopulation and a shortage of food, and Andre Norton's Outside shows two children among the last survivors of contaminated Earth.

In relation to self--While books of reality help readers touch the actual world, books of fantasy and imagination develop the inner man. Books are among a reader's best friends: they are always there, always ready to be read, always the same. They lend security to those who feel rejected, and they provide escape to those who need to withdraw from the troubles of the day. Dr. Bruno Bettelheim, an eminent child psychiatrist, points out in "The Uses of Enchantment" that

> ...nothing can be as enriching and satisfying to the child and adult alike as the folk fairy tale...from then a child can learn more about the inner problems of man and about solutions to his own (and our) predicaments in any society, than he can from any other type of story within his comprehension. (Bettelheim, 1975: 50)

He notes that fairy tales start where the child is, emotionally and psychologically, and give him solutions to his difficulties. As readers identify with heroes and heroines in the stories, they learn that characters meet and solve problems. They learn that there is "bad" in the world, but that forces of evil must be faced and overcome. As the fairy-tale characters win over the wicked villains, children learn that winning is possible, and they feel a glow of satisfaction as the story ends "happily ever after." These satisfying tales provide security for growing up and help children develop their own definitions of what is right and what is wrong.

David A. Williams, who has tested his theories on Arizona State Prison inmates, echoes the same idea. He believes that anxiety and a sense of

alienation can be relieved by the reading of imaginative literature. In a newspaper account, he is quoted as saying that a

> ...human being's major concern in life is to determine what it means to be a human being...Man has to find himself, but the paradox is that to find himself he has to get out of self. Imaginative literature has always afforded the opportunity to do this...
>
> Literature is one of the fastest ways to connect man back to the human force...It is hard to talk about greed, lust, faith, love for instance. There are many feelings we harbor which we don't share because we think other don't have these feelings...
>
> Literature is not something to be studied but to be experienced as one of the most civilizing acts man can know. Art is the only tool I know that talks about what it means to be a human being. (Williams, 1977: 8)

Probably the most familiar example of a story that provides security to young children is Maurice Sendak's Where the Wild Things Are. It describes how Max acts up like a wild thing, is sent to his room where a wild jungle grows, and sails away to become the King of all the Wild Things. But later he sails back to his room, where he finds his supper waiting, still hot -- with the implication that someone loves him anyway.

Friendship and a measure of security are shown in A Toad for Tuesday, when Warton, the toad, makes friends with his enemy the owl, even though Owl had promised to eat him on Tuesday. The climax of the story comes when Warty and his mouse friends, all on skiis, save the owl from the jaws of a fox, even though Warty did not then know that Owl had already decided not to eat him.

Security is found in family stories like the All-of-a-Kind books, the Moffats, the Melendys, the Henry Huggins series, and most of all, perhaps, in the Little House books.

Poetry too, contributes as readers identify with topics and ideas.

John Ciardi's "Mummy Slept Late and Daddy Fixed Breakfast" is a humorous poem that casts aspersions on Father's attempt to make waffles, but at the same time conveys the feeling of "Mummy and Dad" there to help. And what is more comforting than A. A. Milne's poem "Us Two."

> Wherever I am, there's always Pooh,
> There's always Pooh and Me.
> Whatever I do, he wants to do,
> "Where are you going today?" says Pooh:
> "Well, that's very odd 'cos I was too.
> Let's go together," says Pooh, says he.
> "Let's go together," says Pooh.
> (Arbuthnot and Root, 1968: 105)

Plus four more stanzas in the same vein.

Security and humor abound in the Paddington stories, recently imported from England. He received his name because he arrived in Paddington Station, London, from "Darkest Peru" with a tag around his neck saying, "Please be kind to this bear." He is rescued by the Brown family and immediately becomes one of them. His antics in a people world provide the humor, but underlying the episodes are the love and acceptance he receives in spite of his blunders. On one occasion when he was at the seashore, he heroically dived into the water to rescue a man in a boat who was frantically waving for help. But the boat was farther away than Paddington realized, and he had to be fished out of the water.

> When Paddington came round he found to his surprise that he was lying on his back surrounded by a large crowd of spectators, while a man in oilskins pulled his two front paws backwards and forwards.
>
> "You've swallowed enough water to float a battleship," explained a voice as he opened his eyes. "Nothing to worry about, though -- we're just giving you artificial respiration."
>
> Paddington sat up. "Artificial respiration?" he exclaimed in alarm. Although he'd spent his last twopence he felt Mr. Brown would be only too pleased to pay for the real thing if only he could be found, and he gave the man a cold stare. (Bond, 1975: 56)

He's a bit like Pooh there.

The security of love is also the theme of Margery Williams' The Velveteen Rabbit, first published in 1922 but now 400,000 copies later, as a children's classic and avidly read by college students as well. One day the Rabbit asks:

> "What is REAL? ... Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?"
>
> "Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become real." (Williams, 1922: 13-14)

Eventually, when the Rabbit was old and very shabby because he had been loved so much, he is turned into Real by the nursery magic Fairy.

> "Wasn't I Real before?" asked the little Rabbit.
>
> "You were Real to the Boy," the Fairy said, "because he loved you. Now you shall be Real to everyone." (Williams, 1922: 30-31)

Another book of fantasy is Stoneflight, the story of Janie's night flight over New York City on the back of Griff, the stone griffin usually perched at the top of her apartment building. She becomes Mistress of the Stones and meets other sculptures of the city at a mass meeting. But underneath the fanciful story is Janie's concern that her parents may be splitting up. In the end, when things look brighter, her Uncle Arthur leads her to realize that her drawing may be a way to help her when things get rough.

Books also help readers gain insight into ways other people live. Sympathy for a plucky hero is created by Slake's Limbo, the story of a boy who makes his home in a subway niche, salvages newspapers to sell, and makes friends with the people he meets in his struggles to survive alone.

This heart-warming story may encourage readers to recognize their own good fortune.

Books like The Hundred Penny Box and Annie and the Old One deal with old people who face death; Only the Names Remain: The Cherokees and the Trail of Tears and When Clay Sings tells of American Indians; What Then, Raman and Moja Means One: Swahili Counting Book are about other countries; and The Art of America Since World War II and The Story of Bip, the clown made famous by the French mime artist, Marcel Marceau, are examples of books in the fine arts.

The books mentioned in this paper are only a "teaser" for the many beautifully-written, exciting, and thought-provoking ones available today for children and young people. To make a selection is not easy, for last year alone, 2,563 juvenile books were published. Teachers and parents are fortunate that they can enlist the aid of school and public children's librarians, who stand ready to help. They have the knowledge and the resources available to lighten the job.

As readers grow in years and sophistication, books should increasingly help them understand their world and accept themselves and others. Thus books matter, not only because they keep civilizations alive but because they act as a civilizing force for humanity as well.

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Fireweed, Jill Paton Walsh

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A Book of Satellites for You: The Sun: Our Nearest Star; Gravity Is a Mystery; Solar Energy, Franklyn Branley

Television Works Like This; Solids, Liquids, and Gases, Jeanne Bendick

Conservation in America, Dorothy Childs Hogner

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The White Mountains; The City of Gold and Lead; The Pool of Fire, John Christopher

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Moja Means One: Swahili Counting Book, Muriel Feelings

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